

Committee Approves Mercury Export Ban Act of 2007

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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

For Immediate Release: October 30, 2007

Contact: Jodi Seth or Lauren Bloomberg, 202-225-5735

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Bill prohibits the sale, distribution, and transfer of elemental mercury; creates a long-term storage solution

Washington, D.C. — The Committee on Energy and Commerce completed a markup today on H.R. 1534, "The Mercury Export Ban Act of 2007," legislation aimed at preventing mercury exposure and developing a long-term storage solution. The bill was approved by a vote of 45-2.

"I applaud my colleagues for moving this bill forward," said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. "More than 3,000 lakes, rivers, and streams in the United States have fish consumption advisories for mercury, and this bill takes significant steps toward removing it from the environment. I also note that it has achieved a rare outcome in recent history: the support of the chemical and mining industries, the environmental community, and the States."

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin with long-term health risks, especially for children and developing fetuses. The most significant source of mercury exposure to people in the United States is ingestion of mercury-contaminated fish. A recent report from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on U.S. fish advisories shows that 48 States have issued advisories, covering more than 14 million lake acres and almost 890,000 river miles.

H.R. 1534 would amend the Toxic Substances Control Act to prohibit the sale and distribution of elemental mercury by Federal agencies. Additionally, it would reduce the global supply and demand of mercury with the prohibition of elemental mercury exports by 2010.

"Passing this legislation is essential to the health of local, regional, and global populations because mercury is a transboundary pollutant, it knows no borders," said Rep. Albert Wynn (D-MD), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials, "Mercury can travel long distances and deposit in land and water, affecting our drinking water and the food we eat."

"Mercury is harmful whether it is inhaled, ingested or absorbed through the skin," Rep. Tom Allen (D-ME) said. "My bill seeks to combat a large source of mercury pollution worldwide: namely, the export of elemental mercury from the United States to developing countries. It has the support of a broad coalition of environmental and public health organizations in the U.S., including the American Medical Association, the American College of Preventive Medicine and the Nature Conservancy."

Following subcommittee approval on August 2, 2007, a bipartisan agreement was reached with state governments and industry stakeholders for a long-term storage solution. The agreement creates a long term storage option in which private supplies of elemental mercury would be stored at a facility designated by the Secretary of Energy. This amendment replaces Section 5 of H.R. 1534 which called for the establishment of an Excess Mercury Storage Advisory Committee.

The legislation will now be sent to the full House for consideration.

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

2125 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

